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United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

Persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In its resolution 66/73, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it, after consulting with the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution.

The present report refers to correspondence between the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations regarding actions taken by the Government of Israel in implementing the relevant provisions of the resolution. It also presents the information made available by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA to the Secretary-General on the return of refugees registered with the Agency to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip from Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic.

* A/67/150.

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1. The present report is submitted to the General Assembly pursuant to paragraph 5 of its resolution 66/73, entitled "Persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities".

2. On 17 May 2012, the Secretary-General addressed notes verbales to the Permanent Representatives of Member States, including the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, in which he informed them that in order to carry out the reporting responsibilities entrusted to him in the resolutions cited in resolution 66/73, he would be grateful if the Permanent Representative would inform him by 10 July 2012 of any steps his Government has taken, or envisages taking, in the implementation of the relevant provisions of those resolutions

3. In a note verbale dated 24 July 2012, the Permanent Mission of Israel replied as follows:

> The Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and has the honour to refer to the latter's note, dated 17 May 2012, concerning resolutions 66/72 to 66/75 adopted by the General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session under the agenda item entitled "United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East".
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> Israel voted against those resolutions, as it has done when similar resolutions were adopted by the General Assembly in the past, because of their politicized and one-sided nature. The Permanent Mission of Israel wishes to reiterate its support for UNRWA's humanitarian activities and restate its considerations guiding this voting practice.
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> Even in the face of continuous security challenges, Israel has gone to great lengths to improve conditions for Palestinian economic development. These activities have included liberalizing the system by which civilian goods enter Gaza, approving a substantial number of UNRWA projects, and facilitating UNRWA's humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian population.
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> In 2011, Israel approved 76 UNRWA projects in Gaza, and 16 additional projects were approved in March 2012, bringing the total number of projects already approved to 92. Nonetheless, UNRWA only commenced work on 46 of those projects, completing at least 10. For its own reasons, UNRWA has only moved forward with approximately half of the projects approved for construction in Gaza. Even though UNRWA has an enormous backlog of projects, Israel is in the process of approving additional projects at the request of the organization.
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> Although Hamas terrorist attacks continued during 2011, the Government of Israel took additional steps to liberalize the policies regulating the movement of both people and goods in and out of the Gaza Strip. There has been a significant increase in the export of goods, including strawberries (436 tons), flowers (over 18 million), textile products and furniture. In March 2012, Israel also allowed exports from Gaza to the West Bank. A total of 18,356 patients and accompanying individuals were permitted to exit the Gaza Strip for medical care, a 5 per cent increase compared to 2010. Today, 93 per cent of all requests for medical care permits are granted.

In 2011, 53,875 trucks crossed into Gaza, an increase of 36 per cent compared to 2010. Of those, 2,670 trucks were UNRWA trucks. It is important to emphasize that the capacity of the Kerem Shalom Crossing exceeds current needs. It is not fully used by the international community. Israel invites UNRWA to make additional use of the crossing capacity and increase the volume of its truckloads coming into Gaza.

In the light of the above, Gaza is showing encouraging indications of economic recovery. Gross domestic product (GDP) in Gaza increased in 2011 by 27 per cent — a significant improvement over the 15 per cent growth that occurred during 2010. GDP per capita increased by 23 per cent and unemployment went down 7 per cent.

Over the last year, the Government of Israel authorized major steps to ease security-related restrictions in the West Bank. Roadblocks were removed throughout Judea and Samaria. There is a free flow of movement for Palestinians between all major cities in Judea and Samaria — from Jenin in the north to Hebron in the south. GDP growth in the West Bank for 2011 stands at 6 per cent and workforce participation has increased by 10 per cent.

The positive trend was maintained during the first quarter of 2012. GDP grew by 5.6 per cent compared with the first quarter of 2011.

Notwithstanding the above, terrorist organizations in the West Bank and Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip remain active in planning, preparing and executing terrorist attacks on Israeli civilians.

During 2011, 988 terrorist attacks emanated from or were carried out in the West Bank and Gaza, which resulted in 21 Israeli fatalities.

During the first half of 2011, we witnessed an alarming escalation in the nature of terrorist activity against Israeli targets in the West Bank and Jerusalem. During the first five months of 2011, 278 terrorist attacks were carried out in or emanated from the West Bank, resulting in the death of 11 Israeli citizens. These included the brutal murder of the Fogel family in March 2011, in which five family members (father, mother and three children — 11 years old, 4 years old and a baby of 3 months) were murdered in their sleep by two terrorists who entered their home.

Incessant rocket fire continues to threaten the Israeli civilian population. In 2011, 680 rockets, mortar shells, and other missiles were fired from Gaza. These horrific acts of terrorism included an attack on 7 April 2011 in which Hamas fired a Kornet anti-tank missile from Gaza at a yellow school bus, killing an Israeli teenager.

Although Israel supports UNRWA humanitarian activities, it remains concerned by the political motivation of the aforesaid resolutions, and is disturbed by the fact that they present a one-sided narrative that fails to reflect the reality on the ground.

In this regard, public statements by UNRWA officials, carrying a strong political and one-sided message are deeply troubling. For example, a senior UNRWA official posted the following remark on Twitter on 25 March 2012: "The Quartet deprived Palestinians of the right to use even legitimate violence

so we must empower them with all non-violent means of change".[1] As a professional, humanitarian body, UNRWA must be vigilant in avoiding references to matters of a political nature, particularly those that encourage violence.

Israel supports a consolidation of UNRWA resolutions, removing all extraneous political language. Moreover, Israel urges the Secretary-General and UNRWA to consider, together with concerned parties, ways in which the United Nations can enhance the manner in which it advances the welfare of the Palestinian people.

In this respect, Israel strongly supports an application in the Palestinian context of the standard principles guiding the United Nations with respect to the treatment of refugees. Specifically, the UNRWA mandate should be consistent with the standard United Nations policy on refugees. Furthermore, the UNRWA mandate should include the active promotion in the Palestinian context of the broadly applied United Nations goals of resettlement and local integration of refugees.

Unlike other refugee populations, which are not treated by UNRWA and which, when their plights are resolved, decrease in size and return to general civilian life, the Palestinian refugee population has grown at an exponential rate, from 700,000 in 1949 to 4.2 million in 2005 to 4.9 million in 2012, and is due to reach 6.2 million in 2020. As the resolutions are of a political nature, UNRWA as an organization does not inspire to create a solution to the refugee problem and rehabilitate the refugees but only maintain their status. Those refugees are reliant on international aid and funds for their health, education and livelihood now into their fourth generation. The aspiration to maintain the political issue at the expense of the humanitarian needs of the refugees as reflected in the resolutions is also reflected on the ground as even the Palestinian Authority would not take responsibility for providing services to the refugee population even in areas under its complete control and insists that only UNRWA provide services to the refugees.

The annual General Assembly resolutions on UNRWA and the mandate of the organization represent a politically motivated departure from the standard United Nations policy on refugee matters. This politicization of a strictly humanitarian issue has exacerbated the situation of the Palestinian refugees by preventing practical solutions to their needs, such as have been successfully implemented with respect to numerous groups of refugees around the world. Israel attaches importance to promoting such changes in these resolutions that will ensure that the mandate of UNRWA is consistent with the general principles guiding United Nations policy on refugees.

4. In connection with paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 65/99, the Secretary-General has obtained from the Commissioner-General of UNRWA the information available to him on the return of refugees registered with the Agency. As indicated in previous reports on the subject, the Agency is not involved in any arrangements for the return of refugees, nor is it involved in any arrangements for the return of displaced persons who are not registered as refugees. Its information is

[1] As referred to in Ambassador Manor's letter to the Commissioner-General, Filippo Grandi, dated 28 March 2012.

based on requests by returning registered refugees for transfer of their UNRWA registration records from Jordan, Lebanon or the Syrian Arab Republic to the areas to which they have returned. The Agency would not necessarily be aware of the return of any registered refugees who did not request the transfer of their registration records. So far as is known to the Agency, from 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2012, 106 refugees who were registered with UNRWA returned to the West Bank and 419 to the Gaza Strip from places outside the occupied Palestinian territory. It should be noted that some of these people may not have been displaced in 1967 but in earlier or later years or may be members of the family of a displaced registered refugee. Thus, taking into account the estimate given in paragraph 4 of the previous report (A/66/222), the number of displaced registered refugees who are known by the Agency to have returned to the occupied territories since June 1967 is about 34,164. The Agency is unable to estimate the total number of displaced inhabitants who have returned. It keeps records only of registered refugees and, as noted above, even those records, particularly with respect to the location of registered refugees, may be incomplete.

5. In connection with paragraph 3 of General Assembly resolution 66/73, the Secretary-General refers to the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2011 (A/67/13) and to the previous reports of the Commissioner-General for accounts of the continuous and ongoing assistance provided by UNRWA to persons displaced and in need of continued assistance.